



Chef's special



A



B

Planning is the essential ingredient to getting the heart of the home right, writes **Jennifer Veerhuis**

For many of us the place where food is prepared is also the hub of the home, so choosing a suitable kitchen and company to supply it can be difficult. After all there are many decisions to be made, including the amount you can spend, the inclusions and materials you want and the level of involvement you would like the kitchen company to have.

Michael Kitchener, the owner of custom kitchen design company Kitcheners Kitchens, says people generally look for three things when buying a kitchen.

"Everyone looks for the best quality they can get, the best service they can get and the cheapest price they can get," he says.

But generally, he says, people are not willing to forgo quality.

A good kitchen will be of sturdy construction, Michael says. It will have cupboards and drawers made of highly moisture-resistant board and will feature quality mechanisms, such as hinges and drawer runners.

Michael says that apart from custom-made kitchens, other types available include modular kitchens, where the units are set sizes, and flat-pack kitchens, which need to be assembled either by the buyer or a kitchen installer, generally on-site.

Of course, the cost can be a deal-

breaker for many people, with kitchen prices ranging from less than \$10,000 up to \$50,000 or even more, depending on the appliances and materials selected and whether the buyer is organising installation.

Design of the times

For those looking to appoint a kitchen company, there are numerous factors to take into account.

Michael believes in-home consultations are vital when planning a new kitchen.

"Sure it's important for kitchen companies to have a showroom so you can go and visit them to look at their quality, work, selections, variety and designs, but to have someone come out to your house is essential," he says.

"I believe the design brief should be done where the kitchen is going to be, not in an office or a showroom.

"You can get a lot more understanding of the client, having the designer go and do an in-house consultation."

Michael also believes homeowners should seek out reputable companies, and says companies that have won design awards and business awards are a good indication of quality.

"Research online blogs, the companies that do have good communication with



A There is optimal storage in this design by Art Of Kitchens
B A striking Eden Brae solution
C Kitcheners Kitchens puts drawers with good mechanisms on top of the must-have list

clients do have a lot of positive blogs and comments," he says.

"The companies that don't communicate well with clients will have either nothing or negative comments."

Another tip is to look for a company that offers a decent warranty and is a member of a professional organisation such as the HIA and the Kitchen And Bathroom Designers Institute Of Australia.

Set the tone

Deciding on a kitchen company is only part of the process, with a multitude of products available for components such as the cupboards, drawers and benches.

Michael says while many people like the look of a polyurethane kitchen, one strong trend at the moment is two-tone kitchens, where items are in different colours or materials.

"We're doing the majority of our work in either a form of melamine or a laminate, in a two-tone, so in a white and timber print," he says.

"That can be real timber like a timber veneer, or one of the man-made designs that mimic and look like a timber print.

"There have been some amazing advances in technology, not just in the longevity of the materials, but the look and finish. Some of the two-tone kitchens are quite outstanding."

Michael says CaesarStone is still

the most requested benchtop but the thickness requested has changed from a chunky look down to a much thinner benchtop, in line with European trends.

Photo finish

At Art Of Kitchens, a designer and manufacturer of kitchens and winner of the 2011 HIA Kitchen Of The Year award, senior kitchen designer Liam Murphy says most clients are still opting for a polyurethane kitchen.

"Basically most discerning clients will go for the two-pack polyurethane, which is a painted door," he says.

"The reasons people are going for it is it wears best, it's easiest to clean and it's nice looking. You can do any colour you like, you can give it a satin finish, that sort of thing."

Liam agrees that the two-tone kitchen incorporating natural materials is becoming increasingly popular.

"We are now doing a lot of feature cabinets in timber veneers," he says.

"People are wanting to incorporate more natural materials so they are using natural veneers and for the benchtops they are using more marble and granite."

He says while most kitchens still have CaesarStone benchtops, some Art Of Kitchens clients are looking for something a little bit more individual.

"A lot of kitchens now might have CaesarStone in part of the kitchen, >>



DONNA'S WISHLIST

Cooking doyenne Donna Hay has just released her own range of dinnerware in collaboration with Royal Doulton. She shares her advice for creating a kitchen that is a pleasure to cook in.

>> What are the basic tools for a well-equipped kitchen?

Small electrical items such as a mixer, stick mixer or blender and a food processor. A good set of knives is always needed, as are vegetable peelers and

silicon enclosed utensils such as spatulas, spoonulas, tongs and spoons. Every kitchen needs graters for vegetables, ginger and parmesan. A quality set of saucepans and a small set of cake tins completes your list.

>> What makes good dinnerware?

All food looks great on white dinnerware and it is highly versatile. In my new Royal Doulton range I have designed a dinner bowl, a plate you can sit in your lap and with its large lip is perfect for eating pasta, risotto, salads with lots of dressing or even soup.

>> What is your favourite piece of equipment in the kitchen?

I cannot live without my KitchenAid Mixmaster. I love baking and so do my boys, so it is never not being used.

>> Which kitchen object do you think is most underrated?

A wide-blade vegetable peeler. You can shave your vegetables instead of slicing them, creating vegetable ribbons which saves time on cooking.

>> Describe your ideal kitchen.

One where everything is accessible but has its place, all in a classic palette of neutral colours. A stovetop on a kitchen island means you do not have your back to people as you cook. A large-tiled floor and glass splashback allow for no-fuss cleaning. Benchtops in reconstituted stone or Corian are ideal. Don't forget a couple of luxuries – a coffee machine and a dishwasher.

Robyn Willis

homequest

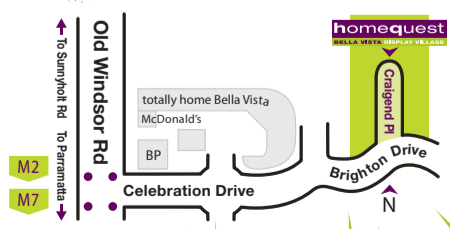


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SPACE FOR JEEVES - OR AT LEAST THE CLUTTER

They hark back centuries but in a case of everything old being new again, butler's pantries are a popular inclusion for many Sydney display homes.

Generally adjoining the kitchen and often concealed in the space that would have been a walk-in pantry, a butler's pantry can include as many or as few appliances as the homeowner would like, along with benches and cupboards, and effectively acts as a second kitchen.

While butler's pantries have been popular in Victoria for some years, it's a trend that has been developing over the past couple of years in NSW, to the point where Metricon home sales and marketing manager Regina Barnes says they are now being requested in 90 per cent of the company's new homes.

She says people often want a complete butler's pantry, including an oven, because of the strong aromas generated by their cooking and the ability to then close off that area when guests arrive.

She says other buyers simply want an extension to their kitchen, so for them the butler's pantry would include a dishwasher, but no oven.

Regina says prices for butler's pantries range from \$3500 upwards, depending on the size of the area and the appliances selected.

"People want their kitchen to look neat when their guests come so the butler's pantry gives them an option to put things in there," she says.

"They can have a dishwasher in there and stack all their dirty items and just shut the door."

Bill Hawie, sales manager at Eden

Brae, says his company started installing butler's pantries in display homes about three years ago.

"As we display them and give people a visual idea of what's involved in the layout and the inclusions, it is definitely triggering people to consider having them in their home," he says.

"I wouldn't say it appeals to everyone, I think it is less than 50 per cent who are opting for some sort of features within the butler's pantry."

He says the main items that can be included are a dishwasher, sink, oven, cooktop, rangehood that is ducted externally, microwaves, cupboards and benches.

MORE INFORMATION

Eden Brae edenbraehomes.com.au

Metricon metricon.com.au

» but they might have a feature island bench in natural marble and a splashback in marble, not necessarily the whole thing."

Liam also says glass splashbacks remain popular and the colour tends to be an individual choice, generally based on other colours in the house.

Storage solution

The main advantage of a new kitchen, Liam says, is that you will get much more storage through use of drawers. Soft-closing doors and self-opening drawers that open at the touch of a finger are available, with multiple sets of drawers common. Fewer large pantries are being requested.

"We make much better use of storage these days with all the hardware that's available," Liam says.

"The traditional normal two-door cupboard only has two shelves and to use that bottom shelf you've got to get on to your hands and knees. We can redesign that same cupboard space with three drawers in there, which gives you 50 per cent more storage and all that storage is totally accessible."

For anyone contemplating a new kitchen, Liam says research is important, as is looking at the kitchen as simply a space.

"Don't buy on the spot, people still do it and it floors me," he says.

"One of the things I've said to people is don't look at the existing kitchen when you are replacing it. We look at the space as a blank canvas. It is a really good way of approaching a design."

Art Of Kitchens finds its clients often want more than just kitchen joinery, with frequent requests for entertainment units, joinery in the living room and the laundry, and integrating an office into the kitchen.

"It's very rare these days for us just to sell a kitchen," Liam says. "Most of the time the client will buy some other joinery for their home at the same time. It's quite a cost-effective way of doing it, we come on site, as opposed to the client buying a furniture piece, and it can be made to suit their needs."

Switched on

Of course, appliances are a key part of any kitchen and Dennis Englefield from Winning Appliances says selecting them tends to be an involved process.

"Probably on average, people come into Winning Appliances for a couple of hours and I would say half of those people don't buy," he says. "They walk out, they discuss it and come back again."

Dennis says customers are generally well

informed about technology and brands, and are looking for value for money.

"The first thing that comes up is the cooking appliances: the oven and cooktop," he says. "That comes down to what's available, the size and the features."

He says people generally buy the microwave with the oven, with many leading brands now positioning the microwave above the oven.

Self-cleaning pyrolytic ovens are increasingly popular, and for cooktops, induction cooking is in demand.

"The main reason is the speed," he says. "They heat up really quickly and they're clean to use. Induction is equal if not quicker than gas nowadays and you don't have the mess."

Dennis says customers need to decide whether to buy freestanding dishwashers and fridges or integrate them into an opening, with freestanding units more popular because of the price. ■

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MORE INFORMATION

Art Of Kitchens artofkitchens.com.au

Kitcheners Kitchens kitcheners.com.au

Winning Appliances

winningappliances.com.au



A Black appliances like this fridge from Winning Appliances are a popular option **B** An island bench is a great way to increase the working surface area

SEE PAGE 12 FOR KITCHEN STORAGE TIPS

